

Testimony of Dorayne Carter  
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United Services

Before the Appropriations Committee  
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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Dorayne Carter and I coordinate a case management program for adults with chronic mental illness at United Services, a non-profit comprehensive behavioral health center located in northeastern Connecticut. I am a member of New England Health Care Employees Union District 1199. I am here today to advocate for people who are suffering from severe mental illness who can not speak for themselves.

Over the course of the 20 years that I have worked for United Services, I have witnessed a severe erosion of services and resources for the disabled. Disabled people who can not work or take care of themselves are made to wait long periods of time before they are granted Social Security. During this process which can take up to several years, the disabled are only eligible for a maximum monthly assistance of \$200 from the Department of Social Services. We have a record number of people living in tents in winter because they can not afford housing. Frequently, homeless shelters are not an option for this population because their psychiatric symptoms make it difficult for them to interact with people and to follow shelter rules.

The following is a partial list of challenges people with severe mental illness face everyday: lack of respite care; no long-term residential programs for those too disabled to live safely on their own; large Title 19 spend downs making it impossible to pay for medical treatment or psychiatric/medical medications; a limited transportation system that makes it difficult to access treatment and other resources; not enough substance abuse treatment programs for people with co-occurring disorders; long waiting lists for subsidized housing; and few payees for assistance with finances. Although these are universal issues, they have become extremely critical for many disabled northeast residents who are living extremely unhealthy, marginal lives and are suffering because our poor rural communities do not have the resources to address these problems.

I understand that we need to be fiscally responsible during this economic crisis. However, I believe that we have a moral responsibility to care for those who can not care for themselves. In northeastern Connecticut, people with severe mental illness have been hurting for some time and can not sustain further cuts in programs and resources. I urge you to increase revenues rather than cutting essential services and resources. An increase in taxes for those making over \$200,000 is a fair way to raise revenue and to balance the budget. I urge you not to make cuts and balance the budget on the backs of this vulnerable population.